

**THE POTENTIAL FOR WORKPLACE VIOLENCE WITHIN THE HOUSTON FIRE
DEPARTMENT**

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

On April 23, 1996, a Jackson, Mississippi, firefighter walked into the administrative offices of the Jackson Fire Department and fatally shot four officers and wounded two others. On March 08, 2000, a Memphis, Tennessee, firefighter shot and killed two firefighters and a Sheriff's Deputy who answered a call to his house. Workplace violence is increasing at an alarming rate. Homicide is now the number one cause of death for U. S. women workers and the number three cause for all U. S. workers. The rate at which supervisors are murdered at work has doubled since 1985. The Houston Fire Department, the nation's third largest with 3400 personnel, scored well below average on the Campbell Organizational Survey that was conducted as part of the National Fire Academy's Executive Leadership course. These results suggest that the potential for workplace violence currently exists within the Houston Fire Department. The problem was that no method of determining the potential for acts of violence occurring within the Houston Fire Department workplace existed. The purpose of this research project was to determine the potential for workplace violence occurring within the Houston Fire Department.

To determine a solution to the research problem, the descriptive research methodology was selected for application.

The research questions to be answered by this research project were:

1. What is the potential for violence to occur within the Houston Fire Department workplace?
2. What methods are available for preventing potential violent acts from occurring within the Houston Fire Department?
3. What methods are available to identify members of the Houston Fire Department who are likely to commit acts of violence?
4. What are the motivations of the members of the Houston Fire Department who could potentially commit acts of violence within the Houston Fire Department?

A thirty-question research survey instrument was designed and distributed to two hundred members of the Houston Fire Department to gather data for evaluation. This survey

instrument was based upon the information obtained during the literature review on workplace violence.

As a result of this research project, it was determined that a toxic work environment exists within the Houston Fire Department and the potential for workplace violence is very high. Many employees are well aware of coworkers with the potential to commit violent acts within the workplace. Many employees have witnessed violent acts that have occurred within the workplace.

Another result of this research study was the determination that many of the Houston Fire Department employees are not well informed on existing policies concerning workplace violence, nor what actions to take when confronted by a violent coworker.

As a result of this research project, it was determined that the existing Employee Assistance Program is not working well with regard to workplace violence.

It is recommended that the Fire Chief should declare a state of emergency and form a task force to immediately begin to actively defuse the potential for violent acts to occur within the workplace.

A "Supervisor Down" procedure should be developed and implemented to provide guidance to employees on appropriate actions to take when violent acts occur.

Another recommendation is that the employee assistance program should begin to play a more active role within the Houston Fire Department.

Training classes are needed in organizational standards, identifying potentially violent employees, confronting violent employees, alternative management styles, defusing tension in the workplace, and existing policies on workplace violence.

Improvements in the hiring process to determine candidates' potential for violence are also warranted.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract.....	2
Table of Contents.....	5
Introduction.....	6
Background and Significance	7
Literature Review.....	8
Procedures.....	16
Results.....	18
Discussion.....	22
Recommendations.....	24
Reference List.....	27
Appendix.....	29

INTRODUCTION

On April 23, 1996, a Jackson, Mississippi, firefighter walked into the Jackson Fire Department administrative offices and fatally shot four officers and wounded two others (Manning, 1996).

On March 08, 2000, a Memphis, Tennessee, firefighter shot and killed two firefighters and a Sheriff's Deputy who answered a call to his house (Associated Press, 2000). Workplace violence is increasing at an alarming rate. Homicide is now the number one cause of death for U. S. women workers and the number three cause for all U. S. workers (Barrett, 1997). The rate at which supervisors are murdered at work has doubled since 1985 (Barrett, 1997). The Houston Fire Department, the nation's third largest with 3400 personnel, scored well below average on the Campbell Organizational Survey that was conducted as part of the National Fire Academy's Executive Leadership course (Campbell, 1999). These results suggest that the potential for workplace violence currently exists within the Houston Fire Department.

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4. What are the motivations of the members of the Houston Fire Department who could potentially commit acts of violence within the Houston Fire Department?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

In October of 1999, as part of the National Fire Academy's Executive Leadership course, the findings of the Campbell Organizational survey were presented to this author. The survey indicated general contentment with the organization, immediate supervision, and coworkers, but a serious concern with senior leadership. The work itself was rated above average, while the working conditions were rated below average. When the top leadership was evaluated, the survey results rated Houston Fire Department senior management low, or very low, on each item surveyed. With a maximum score of 100 on the survey instrument, the top leadership was only rated at a level of 33.

The area of ethics was of particular concern. The Houston Fire Department was only rated 31 out of a possible 100. On questions addressing honesty, ethical issues, ethical behavior, and questions of right and wrong, not one favorable response was recorded.

Of the 18 areas surveyed, The Houston Fire Department rated below average on 13, with only the work itself, coworkers, and immediate supervision rated above average. The stress-free work environment level was rated average.

Overall, survey respondents rated the Houston Fire Department well below average.

Based upon the results of the Campbell Organizational survey, I began to consider the potential for violence in the workplace to occur within the Houston Fire Department. If morale and the views of senior leadership were as low as the Campbell Organizational survey indicated, then logically, the Houston Fire Department was at serious risk for an event to occur in the future which could lead to workplace violence and the

serious injury or death of an employee. It appeared that the most likely personnel at risk was the Fire Chief and the senior leadership of the Houston Fire Department. It was the intention of this research project to determine the risk of a future event occurring within the Houston Fire Department leading to serious injury or death as the result of workplace violence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In reviewing the results of this research study compared to previous work, a trend of increasing violence within the workplace was discovered (National Fire Academy, 1999).

Each year, more than one million healthcare workers nationally are injured in the workplace as a direct result of violence. A growing concern to emergency service providers is the increasing number of mentally ill patients who are on the streets (Wilder, 1998).

The average workplace violence suspect is male, 25-40 years old, has a history of violence or temper control problems, is a loner, has poor self-esteem, is angry regarding perceived injustice at work, owns several guns, has a fascination with military or special forces and their coworkers are concerned about their attitude or behavior (Willett, 1998).

Casual factors of violence generally involve the individual person, the prevailing workplace culture, and the current social trends (National Fire Academy, 1997).

The risk of workplace violence is associated with specific workplace factors such as dealing with the public, the exchange of money, and the delivery of services or goods (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

In nearly thirty-percent of the incidents reviewed, management ignored the early warning signs of violence (National Fire Academy, 1997).

According to James Graves, most acts of violence are "triggered" by some issue in the perpetrator's life. Relationship problems off the job, financial difficulties, hostile conflict with a coworker or a supervisor, substance abuse, poor performance evaluation, and job termination are common triggers (Graves, 1995).

Overman stated that a key characteristic of a potentially violent person is an unnatural intensity of feeling and that anger does not diminish over time (Overman, 1995).

Most organizations are not prepared to manage the problems associated with violence in the workplace (Friend, 1996).

Workplace homicide is the fastest growing type of homicide (Barrett, 1997). One in six crimes occurs in the workplace (Rosenberg, 1999). In the United States, about 1,000 people are killed at work each year (Kaletsky, 1998).

The average jury award in cases of lethal workplace violence is \$2.2 million (Speers, 1998).

In 1994, the Bureau of Justice reported that while government employees made up only 18 percent of the work force from 1987 to 1992, thirty percent of workplace violence victims were federal, state or local government employees (Barrett, 1997).

It is 5.5 times more likely for a women working in local government to be a victim of workplace violence than a women working in the private sector (Rosenberg, 1999). Rosenberg further stated that nearly seventy percent of domestic violence victims are women in the workforce (Rosenberg, 1999).

Non-fatal workplace violence is far more frequent and less likely to be reported to the police. Data indicates that over a five-year period, over half of the incidents, particularly those involving persons known to the victim, were not reported (Warren, et. al., 1999).

According to Barrett, "the greatest threat of violence to employees comes not from the public, but from coworkers and relatives" (Barrett, 1997).

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) defines this category of workplace violence as Type III, where the perpetrator has an employment-related involvement with the workplace (Barrett, 1997).

The National Safe Workplace Institute estimated that workplace violence costs U.S. employers \$4.2 billion in 1992 (Barrett, 1997). In 1999, Rosenberg estimated the cost of workplace violence at \$36 billion per year (Rosenberg, 1999).

In addition, attacks by employees may expose employers to civil suits from victims for such claims as negligent hiring, negligent supervision and negligent retention (Barrett, 1997). In 1997, a California jury awarded an employee \$870,000 when a supervisor hit him (once) during an office argument (Speers, 1998). Barrett further states that such incidents can be a public relations nightmare, eroding public respect and confidence and wreaking havoc if the agency attempts to raise money through new taxes, fees or bonds (Barrett, 1997).

In California, a study conducted by Peek-Asa and Howard, found that Cal/OSHA citations generally addressed an employer's failure to identify and inform employees about potential violence risks (Peek-Asa and Howard, 1999). Investigators issued citations based on the premise that workplace security must be part of a comprehensive safety and health plan (Peek-Asa and Howard, 1999).

This study also determined that government represented 33.7 percent of reported victimizations, but only seven percent of inspections by Cal/OSHA (Peek-Asa and Howard, 1999). The inference is that government employers may not be inspected or issued citations as frequently as private employers when violence occurs within the workplace.

Writing in "Public Risk", Steve Cohen listed several signs and signals for employees who may be potentially violent. These included charm and niceness, typecasting, and discounting the word "no" (Cohen, 1998).

According to Rosenberg, three ingredients set the stage for many threats or acts of violence at work. These are an employee displaying symptoms of performance or behavioral failure, an insensitive manager who "walks by" problems, and some catalytic event in the work life or private life of the employee (Rosenberg, 1999).

Rosenberg further states the typical perpetrator of workplace violence fits the following profile:

- Is a 35-year old male Caucasian
- Prefers his own company to that of colleagues
- Owns weapons
- Displays few outside interests
- Equates his job to his self-esteem
- Has a history of interpersonal conflicts, including conflicts at work
- Demonstrates a sense of being a victim of unjust treatment by others at work and a corresponding sense of being entitled to some perceived debt owed
- Exhibits extreme views, paranoid behavior, and difficulty accepting criticism
- Has experienced a recent stress such as health or family trouble
- Displays unwelcome comments or behaviors at work, related to sex or violence
- Senses a real or perceived danger of discipline, layoff, or other negative event at work

Speer, writing in Occupational Hazards, concluded workplace violence is preceded by conduct and events that point to possible violence, such as:

- Threats

- Inappropriate anger and rage
- Despondence
- Persistent and exaggerated perceptions of injustice
- Erratic behavior
- Violence against a family member
- Obsessive harassment and stalking
- A fascination with weapons and military or paramilitary subjects
- Paranoia and delusions
- Substance abuse

The literature review revealed another profile that was an indicator for potential violence in the workplace. This was the profile for a toxic work environment (Rosenberg, 1999).

Certain supervisory behaviors and styles help lay the basis for workplace violence (Rosenberg, 1999). These include a highly authoritarian command and control manager, an inflexible manager, a changeable and unpredictable manager, a manager who does not recognize employee contributions, and a management atmosphere characterized by secrecy and needless invasions of privacy (Rosenberg, 1999).

Problems in the toxic workplace environment manifest themselves in low morale, high turnover, reduced productivity, and increased grievances and complaints, absenteeism, and displays of hostility and unrest (Rosenberg, 1999).

The literature recognized another factor that contributed to workplace violence known as a catalyst (Rosenberg, 1999). The catalyst is an event or incident that serves as a triggering mechanism to workplace violence (Rosenberg, 1999). Examples of a catalyst are automobile

accidents while on the way to work, family arguments, a diagnosis of illness, personal disappointments, and rumors of impending layoffs (Rosenberg, 1999).

Byrnes advocated an extension of this process known as the Aggression Continuum (Byrnes, 19998). He believes that the Aggression Continuum is composed of three phases, known as the Trigger Phase (the catalyst), the Escalation Phase, and The Crisis Phase (Byrnes, 1998). He also identified the warning signs to mounting aggression, including changes in behavior, body language, and changes in which we communicate with each other (Byrnes, 1998). During the final stage, the Crisis Phase, the aggressor will first lose verbal control, followed by the loss of physical control (Byrnes, 1998).

In reviewing the literature, it was discovered that the four main elements of a violence prevention program are management commitment and employee involvement, a work-site analysis, hazard prevention and control, and safety and health training (Peppe and Yohay, 1996).

One of the most important actions that any employer can take is in the pre-employment interview (Cohen, 1998). The interview should be designed to yield information that predicts how the potential candidate would perform under future job-related stressful situations through a technique known as discounting (Cohen, 1998). Utilizing this technique, the interviewer discounts the candidate's contributions to the future employer repeatedly to discover how they will react to future stressful situations (Cohen, 1998).

Pre-employment screening should also include criminal background checks and a policy not to hire anyone with criminal convictions for violent crimes (Cohen, 1998).

Cohen also suggested that after a candidate is hired, the employee should be given a complete set of guidelines, or policies and procedures, for managers responsible for supervising employees, including a zero-tolerance for violence policy (Cohen, 1998).

A clear definition of what constitutes workplace violence, along with an employee safety committee to examine all safety related aspects of the workplace, are proactive measures that can be taken by management to prevent workplace violence (Cohen, 1998).

Cohen also included a sample policy against workplace violence in his literature (Cohen, 1998).

Rosenberg echoed Cohen's suggestions and offered two fundamental concepts to prevent workplace violence. He suggested "do not walk by something that's wrong" and "R-E-S-P-E-C-T". Every employee, customer, visitor, vendor, and citizen deserves to be treated in a polite, caring, and business-like way by agency employees. Trouble begins when a prevailing attitude of indifference, ignorance, arrogance, intolerance, or lack of patient listening skills is displayed by an employee, while management does nothing to correct the situation (Rosenberg, 1999).

Rosenberg suggested the following interventions;

- Establish a formal written policy of intolerance of workplace violence
- Ban possession of deadly weapons
- Inform employees of policy by training
- Train managers and supervisors of expected performance levels
- Develop a "Supervisor down" procedure
- Support Employee Assistance Programs
- Review physical security
- Avoid negligent hiring
- Fire when necessary
- Be sensitive to employee's concerns about job security

Rosenberg further identified behavioral warning signs of violent behavior as:

- Direct or veiled threats of harm
- Intimidating, belligerent, harassing, bullying, or other aggressive behavior
- Numerous conflicts with supervisors and other employees
- Bringing a weapon to the workplace
- Statements showing a fascination with incidents of workplace violence, statements approving of the use of violence to resolve a problem, or statements identifying with perpetrators of workplace homicide
- Statements of suicidal desperation
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Extreme changes in behavior
- Romantic obsession
- Hate group membership
- Chronic blaming, not accepting personal responsibility or constructive criticism, excessive complaining

Manigan listed alcohol and drug abuse as the top social causes of violence (Manigan, 1994).

Speer advocated that preparedness can be achieved through a comprehensive workplace violence program. That program should include a written policy, a management response team, a reporting and response mechanism, clear standards of behavior, periodic employee training, addressing domestic violence, and a wide array of other security, employment, legal, and administrative practices (Speer, 1998).

Employee Assistance Programs are designed to identify and resolve problems faced by employees and their families (Hess, 1996).

PROCEDURES

In order to determine the potential for workplace violence to occur within the Houston Fire Department, the descriptive research methodology was selected.

A survey instrument was developed to answer the research questions by determining the state of the organizational climate of the Houston Fire Department and the potential for violent acts to be committed in the workplace by an employee. The survey instrument was designed utilizing the information found in the literature review of material related to workplace violence.

The survey instrument contained thirty questions designed to gather data related to violence in the workplace. These areas included anger and rage in the workplace, weapons in the workplace, verbal and physical abuse in the workplace, alcohol and drug abuse problems, the existing level of training on workplace violence, employee responses and actions to workplace violence, and the signs of a toxic work environment. The survey instrument also gathered data on the effectiveness of current management efforts to control workplace violence, such as recognition of consequences of inappropriate behavior, the Employee Assistance Program, and the level of physical security currently in existence. Two hundred survey instruments were produced for distribution.

The survey instrument was distributed to a randomly selected population of representative members of the Houston Fire Department at various fire stations and support areas. All work locations within the Houston Fire Department were written on individual slips of paper and deposited in a cardboard box. Work locations were selected by pulling slips of paper from the box and creating a list of work sites in the order selected. The first two hundred employees encountered from the list of work sites were selected to complete the survey instrument.

The survey instruments were completed by nine A-Shift stations, five B-shift stations, nine C-Shift stations, three D-shift stations, Rescue stations 11 and 42, Hazardous Materials station 22, dispatch center evening shift and the training academy personnel. Two hundred survey instruments were distributed and collected.

Upon completion of the two hundred survey instruments, the data was tabulated. The results were evaluated against the research questions.

The limitations of this research project were the following:

- 1.) The sheer number of members of the Houston Fire Department prohibited every member from participating in the research. The potential exists for someone who did not participate in the research to commit a violent act in the work place.
- 2.) The research survey only measures data at a given point in time. Survey subjects are constantly in a state of change. The survey results could change substantially in a very short period of time, depending upon the work place environment.
- 3.) Under the time constraints of this research project, it was not possible to evaluate changes of the potential for workplace violence within the Houston Fire Department in order to research trends or analyze future risk of increases or decreases of the potential for workplace violence within the Houston Fire Department.
- 4.) Due to the limitations of this study, comparison of the results with other fire department organizations was not possible.

RESULTS

The results of this research project were to determine solutions to the problem of determining the potential for violent acts to occur within the Houston Fire Department workplace. This was accomplished by soliciting answers to four research questions through a survey instrument. The results are presented by the questions researched.

1. What is the potential for violence to occur within the Houston Fire Department workplace?

The potential for violence to occur within the Houston Fire Department workplace is high with 94.5% of the survey respondents indicating that they had witnessed a coworker exhibit anger or rage in the workplace.

In addition, 57.0%, of the respondents had been verbally abused and 14.5% had been physically assaulted in the workplace.

The survey results provided further evidence of the potential for violence within the Houston Fire Department workplace when 46.5% of the personnel completing the survey responded they had witnessed a coworker with a weapon in the workplace.

The potential for violence to occur was confirmed when 29.0% of the employees who completed the survey stated they had considered committing a violent act against another coworker and 53.0% stated they had witnessed a coworker make a threat in the workplace.

Of those who answered the survey, 75.5% stated they had witnessed a coworker who had lost verbal control and 34.5% stated they had witnessed a coworker who had lost physical control.

One of the most important results of the survey was that 7.5% of those who completed the survey indicated that they had considered committing a violent act against the Fire Chief, while 13.5% had considered committing a violent act toward a supervisor.

2. What methods are available for preventing potential violent acts from occurring within the Houston Fire Department?

When asked if they had a working knowledge of the Houston Fire Department's policy on violence in the workplace, only 77.0% of those employees surveyed indicated they did. Inversely, 23.0% of those surveyed did not have a working knowledge of the Houston Fire Departments policy on violence in the workplace.

When asked if they were aware of the standards of behavior for the Houston Fire Department, 27.0% indicated they were not. This was significant, since 29.0% of those responding indicated they were supervisors.

Only 11.0% of the members of the Houston Fire Department who completed the survey had received any training in how to diffuse tension in the workplace.

When the members of the Houston Fire Department who completed the survey were asked if they were aware of the appropriate actions to follow if they witnessed a threat within the workplace, almost one third, 31.5%, indicated they were not aware of what actions to take.

Survey results indicated that only 11.0% of the personnel who completed the survey had been trained to respond to violent acts within the workplace. This was the exact same number of respondents who indicated they had received training in how to diffuse tension in the workplace.

When asked if they were angry with a coworker, would they utilize the employee assistance program, only 50.0% of the employees surveyed would have chosen this option.

Of the two hundred respondents, 41.5% of the employees surveyed felt that their workplace was physically secure, while 58.5% did not.

Of those surveyed, only 69.5% believed that the Houston Fire Department would terminate an employee for committing a violent act within the workplace. Inversely, the survey results indicated that 30.5% of those surveyed do not believe they would be terminated if they committed a violent act within the Houston Fire Department workplace.

3. What methods are available to identify members of the Houston Fire Department who are likely to commit acts of violence?

Of those who answered the survey, 48.5% stated they were aware of a coworker who they believed was capable of committing a violent act toward another coworker, yet only 13.0% of the respondents had been trained to recognize potentially violent coworkers.

In addition, 66.0% of the survey respondents stated they were aware of a coworker with a fascination with weapons and 32.5% indicated

they were aware of a coworker who had made direct or veiled threats of harm against specific individuals.

4. What are the motivations of the members of the Houston Fire Department who could potentially commit acts of violence within the Houston Fire Department?

Of those who completed the survey, 10.0% stated they had heard a coworker make statements of suicidal desperation.

In addition, 32.5% of the survey respondents stated they were aware of a coworker with alcohol or drug abuse problems.

In describing the management of the Houston Fire Department, 45.0% believed the management to be inflexible, 61.5% believed them to be unpredictable, and 64.5% found them to be highly authoritarian, all indicators of the toxic work environment as described by Rosenberg (Rosenberg, 1999).

Another indicator of the toxic work environment was that 57.0% of the survey respondents described the management as self-centered and arrogant.

When asked if the management was characterized by demands for more and more work without resources or the recognition of the strain being put on employees, 73.0% stated “yes”.

DISCUSSION

In reviewing the results of this research study compared to previous work, I discovered that the potential for violent acts to occur within the Houston Fire Department workplace is very high, and in fact, very probable. Of those completing the survey, almost one third, 32.5%, were aware of a coworker who had made direct or veiled threats of harm against a specific individual and 14.5% had indeed been physically assaulted in the workplace. Verbal assault was almost four times more likely to occur, with 57.0% of the respondents indicating that they had been verbally assaulted in the Houston Fire Department workplace.

Since 94.5% of the survey respondents had witnessed anger or rage in the workplace, it is undeniable that anger is occurring frequently. In fact, 75% of the employees surveyed had witnessed a coworker so angry they had lost verbal control and 34.5% had witnessed a coworker who lost physical control.

Almost half of the employees surveyed had witnessed a weapon in the workplace, while two thirds of the respondents had witnessed a coworker with a fascination with weapons, both factors indicating high potential for violence to occur. The combination of anger and weapons in the workplace has the potential to lead to incidents, if a catalyst is introduced, according to the literature review.

The Houston Fire Department is an organization in need of major improvement in the organizational climate. From the respondent's point of view, the work place matches the definition of the toxic work environment, with management viewed in a very negative manner. The employees view the management as unpredictable, highly authoritarian, self-centered and arrogant. Those feelings by the employees set the stage for retaliation through acts of violence. In fact, 7.5% had considered committing a violent act against the Fire Chief and 13.5%

considered committing a violent act against a supervisor, according to the data gathered. Almost one half of the employees completing the survey are aware of a coworker that they believe to be capable of committing a violent act toward another coworker. The other half may be the victim.

Training appears to be ineffective and a lack of knowledge regarding the warning signs for potential workplace violence exists. The data gathered revealed that 87.0% of those surveyed indicated that they had not been trained to recognize potentially violent coworkers, and 89.0% had not been trained to respond to acts of violence within the workplace.

Another indicator of the ineffectiveness of the employee training was that 27.0% of those surveyed were not aware of the standards of behavior for the Houston Fire Department. Without knowing what the organizational standards of behavior are, it is highly unlikely that the employees will adhere to those standards.

With 29.0% of those completing the survey indicating they are supervisors, and 27.0% of the survey respondents indicating they were unaware of the standards of behavior within the Houston Fire Department, it is suggested that at least some of the supervisors may be unaware of the standards of behavior for the Houston Fire Department.

Many of the signs and symptoms described by other authors in the literature review of work environments conducive to violent events were confirmed as present by the research survey. Some of those symptoms were employees exhibiting anger and rage, physical and verbal abuse, weapons in the workplace, statements of suicidal desperation, employees losing verbal and physical control, and a management style that is highly authoritarian and inflexible. With 73.0% of the employees surveyed characterizing the management as demanding more and more work without resources or the recognition of the strain being put on employees, it is of little surprise that stress levels are high within the Houston Fire Department.

The implications of this study are clear. If change is not implemented immediately within the Houston Fire Department work environment, it is probable that acts of violence will occur. The work environment contains angry employees, drug and alcohol abuse, weapons, a highly authoritarian and inflexible management style, little concern for the consequences of acts of violence, unclear standards of behavior, ineffective training, and a work environment that is not physically secure. The only missing part of the formula for violence in the workplace is the catalyst or triggering device.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Houston Fire Chief declare a state of emergency within the organization and immediately form a task force committed to reducing the potential for violence within the Houston Fire Department workplace.

It is recommended that the Houston Fire Department develop a screening process to identify existing employees who have demonstrated the behaviors associated with workplace violence.

Another recommendation is for the Houston Fire Department to improve the application screening process. This would include the application of the "discounting" interview technique and implementing a screening process designed to identify candidates who demonstrate the behaviors linked to workplace violence. Candidates with previous records of violence should be eliminated from consideration for employment.

Steps should be taken immediately to remove all weapons from the Houston Fire Department workplace.

Another recommendation is for the Houston Fire Department to conduct management and supervisory training classes to improve supervisors' behaviors and improve the work climate and atmosphere. This would include training in the recognition of warning signs and symptoms of employees with the potential for violent behavior. Modern, effective, proactive leadership and management styles should be taught to supervisors within the Houston Fire Department. These courses should include the concept of flexible thinking and team building.

In addition, training classes to prepare supervisors to defuse tension and conflict in the workplace are needed. Training classes to prepare all employees concerning how to confront aggressive coworkers are also needed and should be implemented as soon as possible.

Training courses on anger management and stress reduction are recommended.

According to Byrnes, the most effective way to prevent workplace aggression and violence is to train employees by introducing the concept of Aggression Managers (Byrnes, 1998). The Houston Fire Department should begin to train all employees in these techniques immediately.

Training classes are needed to reinforce the organizational standards of behavior and to clarify the organization's response to employees who commit acts of violence.

Periodic and ongoing training classes on workplace violence, organizational policy's workplace violence procedures, and standards of behavior are recommended for all employees of the Houston Fire Department.

The Houston Fire Department needs to take immediate steps to improve the organizational climate of the workplace. The data gathered indicate that the elements of toxic work environments are currently operating within the Houston Fire Department. These steps include management-style training, documentation of the organization's commitment to solving

problems, removing all excuses and making all employees responsible for their own behavior, identification of a baseline of intolerance for violent behaviors, taking threats seriously, and not rewarding threatening or violent behaviors.

As Rosenberg pointed out, "abuse of power is the binding tie in these illegal, unethical, and destructive activities" (Rosenberg, 1999).

The Houston Fire Department should conduct a comprehensive review of the physical security of all facilities and correct deficiencies.

A review of the Houston Fire Department Employee Assistance Program is warranted. The current program is not successfully impacting the workforce, as demonstrated by this survey and the Campbell Organizational Climate survey. Only one half of the employees surveyed indicated they would utilize the Employee Assistance Program if they felt angry with a coworker. Increased visibility and improved marketing of the program and its benefits are needed.

The Houston Fire Department should develop a "Supervisor Down" or "Supervisor Needs Assistance" procedure and train all employees in the implementation of the procedure.

Under Texas Local Government Code 143, the Fire Chief must conduct all employment terminations within the Houston Fire Department. The Fire Chief and other officers should be trained in the legal concept of negligent retention.

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APPENDIX

This research survey is part of the National Fire Academy Executive Fire Officer Program's Executive Leadership course. Your answers will not be viewed by anyone other than myself. Absolutely no effort will be made to discover who completed the survey or how they responded. In order for the data to be accurate, complete honesty in your choices is required.

Thank you for your assistance.

Gary M. Vincent

SURVEY

1. Have you ever witnessed a coworker exhibit anger or rage in the workplace?
Yes No
2. Have you ever witnessed a coworker with a weapon in the workplace?
Yes No
3. Have you ever been verbally abused in the workplace?
Yes No
4. Have you ever been physically assaulted in the workplace?
Yes No
5. Do you have a working knowledge of the Houston Fire Department's policy on violence in the workplace?
Yes No
6. Have you ever witnessed a coworker with a fascination with weapons?
Yes No
7. Have you ever witnessed a coworker make a threat in the workplace?
Yes No
8. If you witnessed a threat within the workplace, are you aware of the appropriate actions to follow?
Yes No
9. Are you aware of a coworker that you believe to be capable of committing a violent act towards another coworker?
Yes No
10. Have you ever considered committing a violent act toward another coworker?
Yes No

11. Have you ever considered committing a violent act toward a supervisor?
Yes No
12. Have you ever considered committing a violent act toward the Fire Chief?
Yes No
13. Is your work environment physically secure?
Yes No
14. Have you ever witnessed a coworker so angry they lost verbal control?
Yes No
15. Have you ever witnessed a coworker so angry they lost physical control?
Yes No
16. Have you been trained to recognize potentially violent coworkers?
Yes No
17. Have you been trained to respond to violent acts within the workplace?
Yes No
18. Are you aware of the standards of behavior for your organization?
Yes No
19. Are you a supervisor for your organization?
Yes No
20. If you felt angry with a coworker, would you utilize your organizations employee assistance program?
Yes No
21. Would your organization terminate an employee for committing a violent act within the workplace?
Yes No
22. Have you received training in how to diffuse tension in the workplace?
Yes No
23. Have you ever heard a coworker make statements of suicidal desperation?
Yes No
24. Are you aware of a coworker with alcohol or drug abuse problems?
Yes No
25. Are you aware of a coworker who has made direct or veiled threats of harm against specific individuals?
Yes No

- | | | |
|-----|--|----|
| 26. | Would you describe your management as inflexible? | |
| | Yes | No |
| 27. | Would you describe your management as unpredictable? | |
| | Yes | No |
| 28. | Would you describe your management as highly authoritarian? | |
| | Yes | No |
| 29. | Would you describe your management as characterized by demands for more and more work without resources or the recognition of the strain being put on employees? | |
| | Yes | No |
| 30. | Would you describe your management as self-centered and arrogant without recognizing employee contributions? | |
| | Yes | No |

Thank you for taking the time to complete this research survey.

Gary M. Vincent

FINAL SURVEY RESULTS

QUESTION #	YES TOTAL	%		NO TOTAL	%
1	189	94.5		11	5.5
2	93	46.5		107	53.5
3	114	57.0		86	43.0
4	29	14.5		171	85.5
5	154	77.0		46	23.0
6	132	66.0		68	34.0
7	106	53.0		94	47.0
8	137	68.5		63	31.5
9	97	48.5		103	51.5
10	31	29.0		169	84.5
11	27	13.5		173	86.5
12	15	7.5		185	92.5
13	83	41.5		117	58.5
14	151	75.5		49	24.5
15	69	34.5		131	65.5
16	26	13.0		174	87.0
17	22	11.0		178	89.0
18	146	73.0		54	27.0
19	58	29.0		142	71.0
20	100	50.0		100	50.0
21	139	69.5		61	30.5
22	22	11.0		178	89.0
23	20	10.0		180	90.0
24	65	32.5		135	67.5
25	65	32.5		135	67.5
26	90	45.0		110	55.0
27	123	61.5		77	38.5
28	129	64.5		71	35.5
29	146	73.0		54	27.0
30	114	57.0		86	43.0